

Return to Work Facilitation Program

Do you have employees that are off work due to injuries or illnesses? As a Federal manager or supervisor, you play an important role in the successful return to work, sustained productivity, and continued health of these valued employees. Federal Occupational Health's (FOH) Return to Work Facilitation Program is designed to benefit both Federal agencies and employees by helping employees return to productive work as quickly as is appropriate after an injury or illness. Agencies benefit by maintaining productivity levels, reducing absenteeism, and lowering health care premiums. Employees benefit through improved morale and sense of job satisfaction.

After an injury or illness, an employee's most effective route back to good health is to return to a normal life and a satisfying work routine. The strength of an employee's connection to the workplace and to the supervisor has a powerful effect on the recovery process and the employee's subsequent return to work. Employees who maintain a connection to their workplace and supervisor throughout their absence and who return to work as soon as medically capable are generally more satisfied with their recovery process and more productive upon their return to work. Return to work facilitation includes strengthening these connections and increasing an employee's sense of value within the agency. Return to work facilitation is successful because employees who feel appreciated are much more likely to return to work promptly and to participate actively in the return to work process.

Services Provided by FOH's Return to Work Facilitation Program

FOH's Return to Work Facilitation Program provides a structured, monitored series of meetings between the supervisor and the employee, who may have been absent from work on workers' compensation or disability leave. The meetings are coordinated by an FOH Return to Work Facilitator and begin as soon as possible after the illness or injury. If it is practical, the meetings are held at the worksite and provide a supportive, objective forum for discussion of return to work issues. The goals of these meetings are to bring together the recovering employee and supervisor in order to define the employee's abilities in relation to the job demands, as well as to identify areas where flexibility can ensure appropriate and timely return to work. The focus is on the employee's functional capabilities and abilities, rather than any disability, and on reasonable accommodations that can assist in getting the employee back to work as quickly as the employee can manage.

FOH maintains a national network of trained and credentialed Return to Work Facilitators who are highly skilled in the areas of interpersonal communication and consensus building. During the facilitated meetings, the facilitator's goal is to ensure that there is clear communication between a supervisor and employee, empathy and sensitivity toward the employee, and appreciation for the employee's dignity and confidentiality. The Return to Work Facilitators also keep the meetings focused on ways the employee can best resume duties and contribute to the workplace, while avoiding initiating any discussion about the medical condition related to the absence from work.

If the employee, supervisor, or facilitator identifies a potential barrier to return to work, the Return to Work Facilitator provides the employee with appropriate referrals to additional resources. These resources can include ergonomic specialists, safety and health personnel, rehabilitation services, human

resources, unions, labor relations, the employee assistance program for the employee and/or family members impacted by the situation, support groups, as well as placement specialists.

Facilitating the employee's return to work through the structured meetings continues until it is believed that the employee will be able to achieve full performance at the original position or be placed in another position that allows maximum use of the employee's capabilities.

The Benefits and the Results

Safe and timely return to work is of benefit to employees, supervisors/managers, unions, and the Federal government. In addition to the direct and indirect cost savings, the positive impact on employee relations will result in improved employee productivity over the long run.

Some of the valuable benefits of FOH's Return to Work Facilitation Program include:

- Supporting a productivity-oriented workplace culture
- Better utilization of limited/light duty
- Reduction in litigation/mediation costs
- Improved supervisor/employee relations
- Enhanced employee morale/satisfaction
- Decrease in cases on the long-term disability and periodic rolls
- Reduction in funded liability
- Reduction in lost days and continuation of pay costs

Flexible Solutions

Return to Work Facilitation can be offered as a stand-alone service to agencies, or it can be incorporated with any of FOH's injury prevention and disability management services, including reasonable accommodation, case review, medical employability consultation, ergonomics surveys, organizational development, safety inspections, and risk abatement.

For over half a century, FOH has delivered high quality occupational health services to Federal managers. FOH's knowledge of the Federal workplace, combined with strategic partnerships with professional health, environmental and safety organizations, enables FOH to help other Federal organizations maintain a safe and healthy workplace. FOH has created a team of professionals that is unparalleled in its ability to work within the Federal structure, yet remains as flexible and innovative as any private sector provider.

Through convenient interagency agreements, FOH's Clinical Services, Wellness/Fitness Programs, Environmental Health Services, and Employee Assistance and Work/Life Programs can provide your agency with a comprehensive occupational health program that saves you time and money. Our ability to customize services enables you to integrate components of our services with existing programs, enhancing their impact and ensuring that your agency meets its obligation to provide a safe and healthy workplace.

Make Federal Occupational Health your partner in building a healthier, more productive work force. For more information, please visit us at www.foh.dhhs.gov or call us today at **1-800-457-9808**.

Because you need a healthy work force. And we can help you build one.

healthy bodies ❖ *sound minds* ❖ *a safe place to work*
